

HISTORY OF LINCOLN-LANCASTER COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY 1976-2011

"In all of us there is a hunger, marrow deep, to know our heritage. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning no matter what our attainments in life." --Alex Haley

In the spring of 1975, Anna Simmons taught a genealogy class at Southeast Community College. There were some in the class who felt strongly that Lancaster County and Lincoln needed a genealogy society to help each other and to encourage others interested in genealogy.

In November 1975, four ladies, Beth Haring, Louise Johnson, Anna Simmons, and Helen Woolstrum met at Beth's home on a Saturday afternoon for cocoa and doughnuts. From this meeting the nucleus of such an organization was born.

On Wednesday night, January 21, 1976, the first meeting was held at Commercial Federal Savings and Loan, 56th and 'O' Street, Lincoln, Nebraska, with 29 people attending. Two of those 29 are still members of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Genealogical Society. Beth Haring told the group of possible indexing projects that could be done at the Nebraska State Historical Society. The intent was to print the indexes, sell them and donate some more genealogy materials to the NSHS in return.

The date of the next meeting was announced, and the group was told the meeting would be at the Easterday Recreation Center. Individuals were told to bring the names and areas they were working on for a sharing session.

The first formal program was given at the third meeting on March 18 by Ruth Amen. Her topic was "Germans from Russia."

On April 21, 1976, the group chose the name LINCOLN-LANCASTER COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY (LLCGS) suggested by Evelyn Gibson.

The first group activity was June 16. Nineteen people spent the evening cataloging the Mount Carmel (B'nai Jehuda) Cemetery on North 14th Street in Lincoln under the direction of Sharon Hammond.

Beth Haring, Louise Johnson, and Helen Woolstrum served as interim officers from January 1976 until September 1976. In September of 1976, the Society became more formally organized and the following officers were chosen: President, Lester Rumbaugh; First Vice President, Evelyn Gibson; Second Vice President, Ken Coolidge; Recording Secretary, Mary Dickerson; Corresponding Secretary, Rosalie Fuller; and Treasurer, George Martin.

At the meeting on October 20, 1976, dues were set at \$5.00 for an individual membership and \$7.50 for a family membership. Seventy-eight members paid dues for 1976-1977. Five of those 78 are still members in 2010-2011: Beth Haring, Carol Kuebler, Connie May, and George and Helen Woolstrum. All five have served on the Board of Directors. In the intervening years, the membership has been as high as 260 members in 2005-2006. Cynthia Monroe was the 100th member. Dues have increased to \$15 for individuals, and \$20 for a family membership. A patron membership of \$10 has been added. The money from the patron dues is used to fund programs.

The treasurer reported a checking account balance of \$112.41 at the November 17, 1976 meeting. The checking account balance as of December 31, 2010, was \$5,593.98 plus Certificates of Deposit totaling approximately \$8,000.

In January 1977, the first *Newsletter* was published with Beth Haring as Editor.

A Constitution and Bylaws was drafted and sent to the IRS. Classification as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization was needed to obtain a bulk mailing permit. It took some fine-tuning before the IRS granted LLCGS probationary nonprofit status in May 1977. This allowed for the bulk mailing permit reducing postage expenses for mailing the *Newsletter* from \$.13 each to \$.02 each, a savings of \$.11 per *Newsletter*. Another requirement of the bulk permit was that the Society had to mail 200 identical pieces to get the bulk rate. Several genealogical and historical societies were added to the mailing list as exchanges to meet the quota of 200. Permanent nonprofit status was granted by the IRS on January 28, 1982, under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code.

The first volume of the cemetery books, including all the known cemeteries in the Southeast Quarter of Lancaster County, was printed by one of our members in January 1978 and sold for \$5.00 each.

The Society continued to catalog and index all the known cemeteries in Lancaster County with the exception of one. The Society looked everywhere and followed up on many leads, and turned over many stones, but the elusive records seem to be just beyond reach. There is a little cemetery in one corner of the old Lancaster County Poor Farm but the Society was never able to obtain the records for those buried there. The cemetery is located in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 33, Township 11 N, Range 6 E on West Alvo Road near North 27th Street in Oak Township in Lancaster County and is still owned by Lancaster County. There are no markers of any kind in the cemetery. However, there are people who have the gift of grave dowsing who have shown some of the Society members there are bodies buried there.

Melvin and Lela Sittler became members of LLCGS in 1976. Melvin lived all his life on a farm near Martell and was a retired farmer when he joined LLCGS. He soon became an active member when the Society began cataloging most of the cemeteries in Lancaster County. When the Society was given permission to copy the index to Wyuka, the State Cemetery, located on 'O' Street, Mr. Sittler again volunteered his services and was responsible for copying most of the entries.

In the summer of 1979, the Society had the opportunity to obtain the original copies of old newspapers from the Nebraska State Historical Society for indexing purposes. These newspapers had been microfilmed and were stored in bunkers at the former Mead Ordinance Plant near Mead, Nebraska. The bunkers were not ideal storage facilities but many of the newspapers were in fair condition. The group was very interested in the project but had no storage space, so the idea was dismissed. A few days later, Mr. Sittler called one of the board members and offered to store them in the barn on his farm.

In July 1979, the first load was picked up and taken to his farm. In June 1980, a 16' farm truck and a pickup were used to haul a second load (approximately 250 cubic feet) of newspapers to Mr. Sittler's farm.

As soon as the first truck was unloaded, Mr. Sittler began the task of extracting the vital information contained in the newspapers prior to 1906 when vital record registration began in Nebraska. The choice of *The Nebraska State Journal* was significant because it often printed vital information from across the State, not just from Lincoln. Many issues of the papers were missing and Mr. Sittler went to the Lincoln City Library and tediously gleaned the vital information from their microfilm copies. He also extracted other information, even society notes if a family relationship is mentioned. He typed the information on 3 x 5 index cards to be alphabetized and then a master copy would be typed for publication. From 1979 to 1984, he had compiled four volumes of the *Sittler Index of Surnames for Which Information Has Been Abstracted From The Lincoln, Nebraska State Journal May 1873-December 1899*. These became known as *The Sittler Indexes* and were the first publications to be copyrighted by LLCGS.

At one time in his indexing he commented that he had "worn out two typewriters, gone through 16 miles of ribbon and spent thousands of hours extracting information for *The Sittler Indexes* alone." Melvin Sittler indexed years 1873 to 1900 before a heart attack claimed his life. Various other members of the Society have continued with the indexing project since that time with years 1903, 1904, and 1905 being indexed and printed. More issues of the *Lincoln Evening News* have been indexed but not published.

Following his death in 1984, these newspapers have been moved at least four times. Some had to be destroyed because of lack of storage space.

As the years passed, other indexing projects continued. Included were indexes to Lancaster County marriage records, 1903 Lancaster County plat book, a book of rural residents of Lancaster County in 1921, Lancaster County naturalization records, Alba Brown Mortuary records, and some probate records for Lancaster County. Probably the most used indexes are the Sittler Indexes.

On March 30, 1994, Louise M. (McNurlin) Johnson passed away. She was one of the three Founding Members and kept things lively. She was laid to rest beside her husband, Clifton, in the Stromsburg Cemetery. The last thing Helen Woolstrum was able to share with her the last time she saw her a few days before Louise passed away was that plans were underway for a Celebration for the Society's 20th Anniversary in 1996. She was thrilled.

Evelyn Young was the leader in indexing the Lancaster County Marriage Records from 1866 to 1906 which were printed. They are also now on the website www.llcgs.info along with the cemetery books.

The Society met various places including Easterday Recreation Center where the Society competed with the younger generation over the noise level. The Society met at a number of different financial institutions, Southeast High School (where one of our members was the Principal) the State Office Building, and the Cotner Center. Beginning in August 1982, the Society started meeting in the Union College Amphitheater of the E. N. Dick Administration Building on the Union College Campus at no charge.

While the Society was meeting in the basement of Nebraska Federal Savings and Loan, (currently A. T. Thomas Jewelry) it was quickly learned what it was like to lose your meeting location at the last minute. When the board member went to pick up the key, due to a mix up in scheduling, it had already been given to another group. Several phone calls were made but the only location available was Gateway Auditorium at a cost of \$25. One Board member stayed at Nebraska Federal to direct people to Gateway and the meeting went on. Several members donated money to help offset the unexpected expense which was approximately 10% of our funds at that time.

Mrs. Margaret K. McLafferty, the first member of LLCGS to pass away, died on April 22, 1977 at age 86.

A program of awards was instituted in 1980. Awards have been given almost every year since that time.

Gifts of books and microfilm were donated to the Nebraska State Historical Society. From the very beginning, many Society members have volunteered at the NSHS.

Funds have been donated to Friends of the Archives, now known as the Stern National Archives and Records Administration Gift Fund (NARA) since that fund was established.

In May 1987, LLCGS hosted the Nebraska State Genealogical Society's Annual Conference and their 10th Anniversary with Dr. George Schweitzer as the speaker. LLCGS member, Tom McFarland, was Chairman.

The Society has hosted three Everton Workshops and three Heritage Quest Programs. The Heartland Seminar was held in August 1988 with Marsha Hoffman Rising as the speaker.

A conference was held on April 21, 2001 with James and Paula Warren as speakers to celebrate our 25th Anniversary. Many other events were held including a Spring Social in April 1996 with Richard Kimbrough as speaker.

On October 14, 2006, Dr. George K. Schweitzer shared his wisdom with us as we celebrated our 30th anniversary with more than 200 people attending. Bob FitzSimmons was President at the time.

On May 1-3, 2008, LLCGS hosted the Nebraska State Genealogical Society Annual Conference with Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak as the speaker.

LLCGS hosted an afternoon seminar with Fintan Mullan, Executive Director of the Ulster Historical Foundation and Dr. Brian Trainor, researcher director on March 17, 2010.

October 9, 2010, Dr. John Colletta presented an all-day seminar about the "Lives of Our Ancestors" as LLCGS and Southeast Community College from Beatrice celebrated Family History month at the SCC Continuing Education Center in Lincoln. Phyllis Ericson was President at the time.

The first book for the Society Library, *David Thomas and His Descendants*, was donated in July 1977. By January 1978, the Society owned four books. The idea of a Library for LLCGS originated during a car ride to Fremont by some LLCGS members. In the fall of 1981, the Library was opened in the basement of Cynthia Monroe's home. By May 1990, it had grown to 266 volumes plus periodicals and needed more space.

A member of LLCGS, Chloe Foutz, was Librarian at Union College. She was also a dedicated genealogist and family history researcher. She made space available in the Union College Library located in the Don Love building to house the LLCGS Library collection. She made it a point to share her expertise and help patrons look for information on their families. It took 70 boxes to move the Library from Cynthia Monroe's basement. A Library Committee was formed, and they soon became masters at applying labels, attaching book pockets and installing tattle tapes.

In 1992, the Nebraska State Historical Society Executive Board on June 5 gave unanimous approval to move the non-Nebraska genealogical resources from their collection to the Union College Library under a 5-year agreement with LLCGS. The NSHS no longer had space for these materials that were no longer in their statement of mission. On May 25, 2005, ownership of the NSHS collection as well as any books presented to LLCGS in the future by NSHS was transferred to LLCGS permanently.

Chloe Foutz also did many other things for LLCGS. She served on the Program Committee, Membership Committee, many planning committees for various functions, made the arrangements for the meeting room, plus many other things most Society members never knew about. In 2004, Chloe received the national "Volunteer of the Year" Award from the Federation of Genealogical Societies for over 20 years of volunteer service in a multitude of areas to LLCGS.

Various methods have been used to increase the Library collection over the years. There have been "Pennies for Pages," "The Ten Most Wanted" and "Bar Codes," plus the "Memorial Fund" dedicated to deceased members every year. In 1994, a generous donation by Ruth Mosby and her husband made it possible for the LLCGS library to go on the OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) system, making it part of the nation-wide database used by libraries to catalog their holdings. Ruth and Dave Mosby also purchased a computer for LLCGS use as well as one that could be used by library patrons. During the 35 years the LLCGS Library has existed, it has grown to a collection of over 8,000 items of genealogical and other reference materials.

In 1979, LLCGS established a permanent mailing address by renting a post office box at Woods Park Station at 25th and 'O' Streets. In the summer of 2011, the post office box was moved to the Gateway Post Office at 5945 R Street and remains P. O. Box 30055, Lincoln, Nebraska 68503.

In April 1980, Carol Kuebler accepted the position of Circulation Manager. As Circulation Manager, after the newsletters were printed, she put the mailing labels on them, sorted them according to postal regulations and took them to the post office to be mailed every month. She faithfully continued in that job until the fall of 2005 (more than 25 years.) She served the longest in one position for LLCGS.

Roger Wait served the longest as *Newsletter* Editor from February 2003 to December 2010.

In 1980 LLCGS assisted NSGS in sharing a booth at the Nebraska State Fair. Cynthia Monroe was President.

Standing Rules were first adopted in May 1980. In 1990-1991, the Bylaws Committee was asked to revise the Standing Rules. Along with revising the Standing Rules, the committee also undertook the task of compiling a manual of policies and procedures to assist officers and committees in doing their jobs. *The Policy and Procedures Manual* was completed and adopted in March 1992.

The Bylaws were amended in May 1982 to add the Member-at-Large position. The Bylaws were revised in December 2010 combining the Recording Secretary and Corresponding Secretary into one job. It also changed the term Member-at-Large to Director and created two Director positions.

The first membership directory in booklet form was published for 1980-1981.

A series of classes were held in early 1984 taught by Society members: Doris Cunningham, Cynthia Monroe, Larry Ohs and Chloe Foutz. Other classes, workshops, and special interest groups have met.

Programs have covered a variety of topics including how to start your genealogical research, where to find records, international travel research, leading edge DNA science, how to organize your findings and write your family history.

Several field trips have been taken during the last 35 years including trips to the Lancaster County Court House, Love Library on the University of Nebraska campus, the Nebraska State Historical Society, and a Cemetery near Rokeby where Ken Sherwood showed members how to "Locate Graves by Dowsing." Educational videotapes were created for community access cable TV.

LLCGS participated in the Younkers Community Day Sale for five years which was a very good money maker for the Society.

Evelyn Young taught genealogy classes to anyone interested through her church. She also served on the Board as Second Vice President (Membership Committee Chairman) and many other years on the Membership Committee and Program Committee.

Dick Young served as President for two years as well as serving several years on the Program Committee. He also was very handy in solving technical problems at meetings.

Dick and Evelyn Young were instrumental in bringing Dr. Brian Trainor from the Ulster Historical Foundation to Lincoln to speak to a group interested in Scotts-Irish and Irish research.

The July 9, 1991, program "Military Records Throughout American History" given by Paul Madsen from the Veterans Administration, sparked one of our charter members, Connie May, into action. She had a great aunt who had a son she had not seen or heard from for over 60 years. He had served in World War II. The speaker had given very detailed information on how you might locate someone using military records. Using this information Connie was able to locate the son and in April 1992 she witnessed the reunion of the mother and son after 62 years of separation.

The Society supported the preservation of the Thomas Jefferson Hudson log house located at Heritage Park on the Nebraska State Fair Grounds after the University of Nebraska purchased the land owned by the Nebraska State Fair.

Our first website was on Rootsweb with Kathy Harrison as webmaster.

In December 2005, the Society authorized the establishment of a searchable database for posting the contents of LLCGS material. This website was to be separate from the current website but the two would be linked. Al Harlow was the webmaster.

In June 2011, the membership authorized the Society to contract with EasyNet design & access to use as an official member LLCGS internet site. Al Harlow will continue as webmaster for LLCGS.

In the words of Founding Member, Louise Johnson, "Out of a chilly November afternoon with cocoa and doughnuts, a society of over 200 members hunting their ancestors has grown. Look what curiosity, a cup of cocoa, and a doughnut can create."

(Prepared by Helen Woolstrum for LLCGS 35th Anniversary, August 2011)